Oxford Handbooks Online

Monumental Reliefs

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The Oxford Handbook of Roman Sculpture
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Print Publication Date: Mar 2015 Subject: Classical Studies, Classical Art and Architecture
Online Publication Date: Mar 2015 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199921829.013.0022

Abstract and Keywords

Monumental reliefs, also known as “historical” or “state” reliefs, adorned an unprecedented range of public buildings in the Roman empire. Introduced during the Republic, produced mainly under the Principate in Rome, and rarely used as a marker of Roman affiliation in the provinces, monumental reliefs became one of the most distinctive forms of Roman sculpture. Although scholars originally concentrated on the supposed historicity of the events depicted, recent semiotic approaches contextualize the reliefs’ imagery and explore intended messages. Scholarship also has moved beyond merely identifying historical iconography to examining broader categories of imagery across multiple reliefs. Challenges for the study of monumental reliefs include lack of archaeological context, ambiguity in dating and identification, and the reuse (both ancient and modern) of reliefs. Despite a long history of study, opportunities for innovative work remain, including database-driven quantitative approaches, re-evaluations of understudied provincial monuments, and scrutiny of polychromy and topographic contexts.

Keywords: historical reliefs, state reliefs, reuse, representations of architecture, methodology, style, iconography, Ara Pacis Augustae, Valle-Medici, Ara Pietatis, Arch of Titus, Trajan’s Column

Introduction

SINCE the formal study of Roman art began, monumental reliefs have featured prominently in the academic literature, including textbooks (D. E. E. Kleiner 1992) and historiographic studies (Brendel [1953] 1979; Kampen 2003; Elsner 2004). During early efforts to distinguish Roman from Greek art, monumental reliefs held center-stage as among the most indisputably "Roman" sculptures of the corpus. Scholars comparing Roman monumental reliefs to classical Greek architectural reliefs, which almost exclusively featured widely spaced mythological figures against an unsculpted background, argued that the handling of space and historicized narrative in the Roman works constituted the definitive stylistic features of a distinctive "Roman" art. Otto Brendel pointed out, however, that the eclectic yet synchronous styles and wide geographic spread of art under the Roman Empire made the hunt for definitive unifying features a futile exercise ([1953] 1979, with earlier bibliography).

Reliefs also played an important role in early analyses of eclecticism in Roman art. Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli's work on "Hellenistic" and "plebeian" styles in Roman art (1970), for example, depends heavily on monumental reliefs, from the so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus to the Column Base of Antoninus Pius. Indeed, many discussions of the artistic transition to late antiquity draw upon stylistic comparisons between the Column of Trajan and that of Marcus Aurelius or among the pastiche of reliefs on the Arch of Constantine (for a critical assessment, see Elsner 2000; for current approaches, see essay 3.8, Witschel).

Monumental reliefs also garnered attention due to their supposed connection to historic events. Beyond being interpreted as illustrations of events, those panels that seemed to be aligned with historical moments or periods (from the evidence of inscriptions and portrait heads) became linchpins in a methodology that employed stylistic (p. 277) analysis to determine chronology for otherwise undatable reliefs. Gerhard Koeppel's series of *Bonner Jahrbücher* articles (1983–92) represent one extreme in the spectrum of historical-stylistic analysis, attempting to put all known "historical" reliefs from the city of Rome into chronological order. He associated each relief with a historical monument or event if possible and, when not possible, with dates determined by fine-grained sequences of artistic styles. Although some of his chronological proposals are open to debate, Koeppel's articles remain an essential survey of the best-known reliefs and their bibliographies.

More recently, scholars have also analyzed monumental reliefs within their iconographic and physical contexts. Such studies often include other media, such as coins, gems, and privately commissioned sculpture, and the placement of reliefs within monuments and urban programs. Seminal works include Inez Scott Ryberg's study of the depiction of sacrifice (*Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art*, 1955) and Paul Zanker's assessment of the Augustan period (republished in translation as *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, 1988). These two groundbreaking works demonstrate how the study of major

monuments that preserve relief decoration can be integrated within broader studies of Roman society. Monumental reliefs have been also used as evidence to reconstruct the content or appearance of now-lost triumphal paintings (Lusnia 2006), pedimental groupings (Fishwick [2003] 2007), funerary practices and topographic sightlines (Davies 2000), and military commentaries and campaigns (Lepper and Frere 1988).

Nomenclature

Although the corpus of often large-scale public reliefs produced mainly under the Principate in Rome are among the best-known and most studied of Roman sculptures, questions of definition, function, and nomenclature for these reliefs have become unusually complicated and intertwined. The popular English nomenclatures “historical relief” and “state relief” both carry methodological baggage.

The term “historical relief” originated in the belief that a defining characteristic of this genre was the illustration of actual historical events (Strong 1907; Torelli 1982). This hypothesis concentrated interest on establishing a date for each piece, identifying which particular events were depicted, and integrating the interpreted images into the history of the relevant emperor’s rule. Many scholars, however, have pointed out limitations in this approach. First, closer inspection reveals frequent difficulties in identifying individual historical events securely and evidence that reliefs often record idealized rather than “real” events. For example, scholars struggle to identify an appropriate historical procession for the reliefs of the Ara Pacis Augustae, since the individuals depicted were never all together in Rome around the time of the altar’s establishment or dedication (in 13 and 9 BC, respectively; see Rose 1990; Billows 1993; Rehak 2001, 124–33). Clearly, the reliefs cannot be read in the same light as a journalistic photograph.

Click to view larger

Figure 3.5.1 Chariot Relief, Arch of Titus, Rome.

(p. 278) Second, such reliefs often include allegorical figures. To draw again from the Ara Pacis, the supposedly historical reliefs of the processions are only one part of the monument, which also included four smaller relief panels showing allegorical personifications and mythohistorical scenes (see essay 4.8, D’Ambra and Tronchin). The term “historical relief” is of limited value to describe a seated Roma, and referring to the altar as a “historical relief” monument privileges the procession reliefs in our modern understanding of the monument (Holliday 1990; Galinsky 1992). Furthermore, allegorical figures are often found within depictions of historical scenes, such as the Victory joining Titus in his triumphal chariot on the Arch of Titus (figure 3.5.1). Such inclusions belie the assumption that the primary intention of these reliefs was documentary.

A third, related problem with the term “historical relief” is that it tends to unduly emphasize the narrative elements of complex monuments. For instance, the majority of the Ara Pacis is covered by nonnarrative motifs, specifically simulacra of a traditional rustic shrine on the interior and vegetal designs on the exterior. Even the tiny animals found within the curving acanthus vines convey ideas of fertility and rebirth brought about in the new Augustan Golden Age (Kellum 1994). The nonnarrative relief elements are thus essential components of the overall theme of the monument, but are poorly served by the term “historical relief.”

(p. 279) The term “state relief” that has also been used to describe such relief sculptures (Hamberg 1945; Ryberg 1955) assumes a different unifying characteristic: their commission through official channels of the Roman state. As a result, “state relief” may be taken to imply a coordinated propagandistic effort on the part of state actors, along the lines of modern nation-states. This nomenclature privileges the questions of patronage and function and implies answers to those questions that the evidence does not necessarily support. Moreover, it favors the study of relief monuments from Rome itself and contributes to the neglect of provincial examples. The Roman governance, patronage, and honorary systems are all so different from those familiar today that such misleading language should be avoided if possible (Ewald and Noreña 2010).

In particular, despite the inscribed proclamations that relief monuments were dedicated by the Senate and people of Rome, the term “state relief” supports the traditional assumption that the emperor directed or at least approved the reliefs’ designs. Recently, some scholars have tended toward more literal interpretations of the few dedicatory inscriptions that survive *in situ* with associated reliefs (e.g., the Arches of Septimius Severus and Constantine in Rome; see essays 4.5, Tuck; and 4.6, Kellum). They consider how the reliefs might have functioned within a complex dialogue between Senate and emperor, specifically as a means of expressing the Senate’s expectations for proper imperial behavior (see the papers in Ewald and Noreña 2010, especially Mayer 2010). Such scholarship emphasizes that the Roman “state” was hardly a stable, uniform entity, and that the precise role of anyone vis-à-vis design and iconography is near impossible to determine even with epigraphic or literary evidence of patronage.

The challenge of interpreting preserved dedicatory inscriptions calls attention to another problem, namely that such inscriptions are rare exceptions, not the rule. For the majority of the reliefs in question, the use of the finest marbles, high-quality workmanship, large scale, and imperial iconographic themes (battle, *adlocutio, adventus*, triumph, sacrifice, apotheosis, etc.) generally imply installation on public structures, and thus the patron(s) must have expended extraordinary amounts, whether individually or as a group. Nevertheless, basing the nomenclature of an entire sculptural category on an assumption regarding patronage and imperial involvement, however likely, can be seen as problematic, especially given our limited evidence for the mechanisms of patronage.

The phrases “monumental relief,” “commemorative relief,” and the unadorned term “relief” are more neutral and therefore useful for scholars. We have titled this essay “monumental reliefs” because we wish to emphasize the importance of form and context for future innovative study of this material. The phrase “monumental reliefs” evokes, first of all, the scale and quality of the reliefs, as well as their architectural setting. While the original contexts of most reliefs have been lost, their original settings—whether arch, altar, temple, forum, or other public structure—contributed to the essential messages and visual effects of the reliefs and should not be neglected. Indeed, some Roman building types were optimized for the display of extensive relief programs (Hölscher 2009). The word “monumental” also evokes its etymological root, *monumentum*, a Latin word whose full meaning is not perfectly understood but which surely denoted something that commemorated a person, family, or event (Meadows and Williams 2001; see essay 4.4, Ewald).

(p. 280) Chronology and Distribution

The earliest surviving monumental reliefs from the Roman world date to the late republican period. While the prominence of relief ornamentation on so many different types of public buildings as seen in the Roman Empire was unprecedented, Etruscan (see essay 3.2, de Grummond) and Hellenistic antecedents (e.g., the Telephos Frieze of Pergamum; Dreyfus and Schraudolph 1996) need to be considered as part of this genre's development.

Though no precisely equivalent Greek reliefs survive, the earliest extant Roman reliefs have strong Hellenistic connections. The Monument of Aemilius Paullus in Delphi (168–167 BC) features a battle frieze against a flat background. The preserved dedicatory inscription records that the monument was taken by L. Aemilius Paullus from a defeated Macedonian king, leading to speculation as to whether the frieze was added or altered by its new Roman patron, and whether its imagery can be tied to historic events and the emergent medium of monumental reliefs (Kähler 1965; Boschung 2001). The so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus, recovered from the Campus Martius and also dated to the second century BC, combines a (possibly spoliated) frieze depicting a marine wedding procession with a scene depicting a census and a sacrifice overseen by Mars himself (Kuttner 1993; Stilp 2001). The relief from the Piazza della Consolazione, of uncertain date and significance, displays a series of military trophies without narrative context (Hölscher 1980; 1988, 384–6).

Republican monumental reliefs as preserved are thus an eclectic mixture that both differs from and anticipates later reliefs. The extent to which the competitive building projects in the late Republic included relief sculptures is uncertain, but by the Augustan period, high-quality reliefs often illustrating quasi-historical events regularly adorned public structures. The production of monumental reliefs would continue unabated in Rome until the end of the third century AD, when civil wars brought about an abrupt halt. After a brief revival under the Tetrarchs and Constantine, monumental reliefs effectively ceased to be erected in Rome for centuries, although similar monuments were erected elsewhere (e.g., the Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki: D. E. E. Kleiner 1992, 418–25; the Column of Theodosius in Istanbul: Becatti 1960).

Click to view larger

Figure 3.5.2 Detail of the relief from the Monument of Philopappus, Athens.

Another interesting facet of monumental reliefs is their geographical distribution. The vast majority of monumental reliefs have been recovered in Rome itself. The few notable exceptions to this rule mostly seem to be connected to particular efforts to assert connections to Rome (see essays in part V, Regions and Provinces). Some of these reliefs, such as the so-called Tellus or Pax Relief from Carthage (now in the Louvre), seem to be close, if not exact, copies of monuments in the capital, in this case one panel of the Ara Pacis (Zanker 1988, 172–9, 313–15). Provincial monumental reliefs, however, often differ in key ways from their presumed models. The quality of production, the style, and the iconography vary more than in the capital. For example, compare the stylized figures in the processional frieze of the Augustan Arch in Susa (Fogliato 1992; Letta 2006–7; Moede 2007a) with the classicizing frieze of the Ara Pacis, or the abstract duels (p. 281) of Trajan's Tropaeum at Adamklissi (Florescu 1965; Coulston 2003) with the naturalistic battles of the Column of Trajan. The Sebasteion at Aphrodisias (Smith 2013) combines the general subject (praise of the imperial family) and style of monumental reliefs in Rome with (to our knowledge) unprecedented quantity, setting (190 panels in a monumental portico), and imagery (e.g., Claudius's Rape of Britannia). Apparent instances of monumental reliefs in the capital that influenced other media in the provinces are rare but not unknown: for example, the Monument of Philopappus borrows triumphal imagery from monuments such as the Arch of Titus (figure 3.5.1) and repurposes it for a funerary relief in Athens (figure 3.5.2; D. E. E. Kleiner 1992, 233–5).

It is nearly impossible to assess to what extent the reliefs that survive reflect what was actually produced. It is probably significant that so many reliefs have been recovered from Rome itself, although additional excavation and documentation throughout the empire will almost certainly bring forth previously unknown reliefs, such as the relief fragments from Nikopolis celebrating Augustus's victory at Actium (Greece; see essay 5.4, Sturgeon). At the same time, major monuments such as the Column of Theodosius have vanished within recorded memory (Becatti 1960). Some smaller-scale pieces, in stone and other media, have been interpreted as reproducing elements of long-lost monumental reliefs in Rome. For example, the silver cups from Boscoreale (buried by the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79) feature high-relief elements that find parallels in much (p. 282) later monumental reliefs, leading to a hypothesized common model in Rome

(Kuttner 1995). Such cautionary tales warn against taking the preserved corpus of monumental reliefs as an unambiguous sample of ancient production.

Methodology

The process of studying reliefs encompasses the techniques discussed elsewhere in this volume (attention to material, workmanship, polychromy, iconography, chronology, setting, function, reception, etc.), yet other considerations are particular to the genre. Since reliefs were inevitably embedded in larger monuments (such as columns, arches, altars, temples, tombs, etc.), the interpretation of a relief cannot be disentangled from its context. In relief, the individual units of iconographic analysis, including portraits and personifications, body types and clothing, equipment and attributes, animals and vegetation, representations of architecture and landscape features, are part of a larger composition, and much of the meaning is drawn from the interaction of elements. Tonio Hölscher's exploration of Roman art from a semiotic perspective ([1987] 2004) relies heavily upon reliefs to illustrate key points. Hölscher emphasizes that choices regarding iconography, composition, and style communicate ideological messages in addition to their literal content (see also Bal and Bryson 1991; Huet 1996; Elsner 2000).

Monuments frequently encompass many reliefs of different sizes. For instance, the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum includes twelve large panels on the main façades, a narrow, small-scale triumph frieze running around all four sides, two massive horizontal panels in the passageway, and a small square panel in the passageway vault (Rotili 1972). We caution that when working with a set of relief panels such as the two surviving Cancelleria reliefs, their original dimensions and the total quantity of relief on the monument for which they were carved are truly unknowable. For fragmentary reliefs, the unknowns multiply even further.

The large format of monumental reliefs has allowed some research on detecting the work of individual sculptors as well as the processes by which the reliefs were carved (Rockwell 1985; Leander Touati 1987; Conlin 1997; Beckmann 2011). Many reliefs have damaged, abraded, or recarved surfaces (La Rocca 1986), so monuments suitable for such studies are exceptions. In addition, for these studies, direct access to the monuments (often involving scaffolding) is necessary. Extensive postclassical restorations, alterations, and reinstallation on later structures make determining the original appearance of some reliefs very difficult indeed. For example, upon installation several stories high on the façade of the Villa Medici in Rome, panels of the so-called Ara Pietatis (see below) were subdivided and surrounded by additional stucco figures and new backgrounds to create novel pastiches; as a result, photographs of casts of these reliefs are usually reproduced instead, often without noting that fact (e.g., D. E. E. Kleiner 1992, figs. 119–20).

(p. 283) In fact, access to reliefs is a continual problem. A surprising percentage of monumental reliefs remain poorly photographed and minimally published to this day. Photographs tend to feature shots of full “scenes” and neglect details, except for those of interest to a particular study (i.e., close-ups of drapery folds support chronological arguments and faces support portrait identifications). New studies thus are often best served by direct examination of the reliefs themselves. For reliefs that are typically inaccessible, such as the heights of the Column of Trajan, casts can allow up-close examination and measurement (Wolfram Thill 2010), sometimes preserve details that have been lost, especially to pollution (Coulston 1988, 6–10, 79–80), and can facilitate the reunion of fragments now in different museums (e.g., the so-called Dono Hartwig Monument split between the Kelsey Museum in Ann Arbor and the Palazzo Massimo in Rome: Gazda and Haeckl 1996).

Context

Click to view larger

Figure 3.5.3 Detail of the arch from the Spoils Relief, Arch of Titus, Rome.

One of the two most glaring methodological challenges in the study of monumental reliefs is the absence of archaeological context. Reliefs surviving *in situ* demonstrate clearly that topographic location, architectural setting, and panel arrangement were critical to their effect and therefore their interpretation. To give an oft-repeated example, the large passageway relief panels in the Arch of Titus (D. E. E. Kleiner 1992, 183–90) that represent a triumphal procession are augmented by their position inside the arch, so that the viewer walking through the arch joined the procession (figure 3.5.1). The arch depicted in the spoils panel (figure 3.5.3) raises further questions of possible topographic connections between reliefs and (now lost) buildings.

The modern barriers that currently block off the arch's passageway, and thus inhibit the visitor's ability to experience the reliefs as an ancient viewer would have, also serve as an example of how differences from the ancient context can affect modern viewers' perceptions of the reliefs. In certain situations this disparity can be nearly impossible to appreciate fully: the Column of Trajan, to give another much-discussed example, now stands in the open, but was originally surrounded closely by a dense grid of buildings that would have greatly hindered the ancient viewer's ability to see the monument itself, let alone the details of the reliefs (Dillon 2006, 259; Wolfram Thill 2011, 285). Immersive 3-D digital reconstructions of entire monuments within the cityscape could potentially address some of these issues.

Even within a monument, the arrangement of the reliefs could drastically affect their interpretation. The relief panels on the sides of the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum are still *in situ* and arranged so that scenes more directly relevant to the capital are on the side facing Rome, and scenes relevant to the provinces are on the side facing away from the city. In contrast, eight of a suite of Antonine arch panels were reused in the Arch of Constantine, and three are immured in the Capitoline Museum (Ryberg 1967; Angelicoussis 1984; La Rocca 1986). We wonder whether the Antonine panels, which also present a mixture of scenes inside and outside the capital, were originally arranged

(p. 284) in a topographic pattern similar to that on the Beneventum Arch. Or were they arranged in chronological order to produce a narrative effect similar to the Column of Trajan (Ryberg 1967)? To what extent were they also organized thematically to emphasize the emperor's virtues (Angelicoussis 1984)? Even more fundamentally, did the panels belong to one arch or two? How many panels are missing from the series? Different answers to these questions change the significance of the reliefs.

The secondary life of monumental reliefs poses a significant problem for scholars. The Arch of Constantine, decorated almost entirely with spoliated sculpture from earlier periods, is the most famous example of the reuse of major pieces of sculpture within the ancient world; still, no consensus regarding the origins of the reliefs, how or why they came to be reused, or how they were interpreted by the contemporary viewer has yet emerged (F. S. Kleiner 2003; Marlowe 2004). The existence of marble dumps and the removal, transport, and reuse of reliefs haunts scholars who attempt to find significance in some recorded find spots. The Anaglypha, for example, depict the buildings around the Forum Romanum where they were excavated (Hammond 1953; Torelli 1982, 89–118). While scholars have seen much significance in this coincidence, the reliefs were set on postantique bases and immured in a medieval structure (Giuliani and Verduchi 1987, 1: 79–83), meaning they could have been brought from anywhere in the city at any time, either because of or independent of the buildings they show.

(p. 285) Date

In an ideal situation, a dedicatory inscription including a clear date is paired with an *in situ* relief. Only a few such examples exist, however, and even these rare examples can be afflicted by arguments regarding potential discrepancies between the monument's dedication date and the execution and completion of the associated sculpture (Richmond 1969, 229–38; Claridge 1993). An emperor's portrait, another dating method, provides only a terminus post quem, and many imperial portraits have been replaced or reworked. The imperial portraits of the Cancelleria reliefs, currently those of Nerva and Vespasian, were reworked from portraits of Domitian (Pfanner 1981; Hölscher 1992). Scholars often cannot agree about which heads represent imperial family members (Ara Pacis: Rose 1990; Holliday 1990; Koeppel 1992; Beneventum Arch: Richmond 1969, 229–38; Gauer 1974; D. E. E. Kleiner 1992, 228).

When lacking epigraphy or portraiture, scholars use style to date monumental reliefs. Such subjective judgments often fail to provide a convincing chronological argument. The Anaglypha have been dated to both the Trajanic (Hölscher 2002, 141–2; Tortorella 2012, 57–8) and Hadrianic periods (D. E. E. Kleiner 1992, 248–50; Kuttner 1995, 44–51) based on style and content. Similarly, a famous collection of relief fragments, alternatively known as the Valle-Medici reliefs (after the owners of the largest number of surviving fragments) or as the so-called Ara Pietatis (a once widely accepted identification by Bloch 1939; convincingly rejected by Koeppel 1982), for several decades functioned as a

chronological linchpin defining Claudian style, but a firm date for them has proved elusive; since 1982 they have been variously dated to the reign of almost every Julio-Claudian emperor (Tiberius: Rehak 1990; Claudius: La Rocca 1994; Nero: Fuchs 2011).

The lure of identifying a historical event and naming a monument tempts scholars with the promise of a new fixed point for the chronology of styles and with the enticing possibility of an elaborate interpretation of the relief itself. We argue that broad distinctions can be offered in cases like the Valle-Medici reliefs (Julio-Claudian) or the Anaglypha (early second century AD), but further refinement of our chronological schemes on stylistic grounds alone is more often than not impossible (see essays 3.1, Fullerton; and 3.4, Wood). Dating a relief to the Trajanic period while excluding a Hadrianic date based on diagnostic criteria such as drapery folds will always be a speculative enterprise. We can offer here only a note of caution, rather than a solution to this problem. Methodologically, ambiguity should be accepted and a wider date range promulgated for some monuments, as D. E. E. Kleiner has modeled for the Anaglypha (1992, 248–50), until further evidence (if any) helps define the chronology more closely.

Because well-dated monuments—such as the Ara Pacis and the Column of Trajan—admit such close readings of the evidence, scholars become frustrated when similarly complex monuments cannot be convincingly linked to a date and historic event (for instance, the various proposals regarding the so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus from the republican era, better labeled the Paris-Munich reliefs). Interpretations resulting from "what if" readings of monuments based on speculative identifications, however, cannot support further analysis, and sometimes get (inappropriately) entrenched (p. 286) into introductory textbooks. On the other hand, precisely because some reliefs cannot be given a conclusive interpretation, like the stunning but relatively neglected Vatican-Terme processional relief fragments (Liljenstolpe 1996), they are often avoided in favor of objects with more certain significance.

Even with a precise date, the problems of artistry and patronage, of who determined which aspects of a given relief and why, remain almost unknowable. Few Roman texts mention architects or sculptors, and only one relevant sculptor's signature has been discovered (on the Extispicium relief in the Louvre: Laugier 2007; see also essay 2.2, Claridge). To our knowledge, no mention of monumental reliefs per se has been identified in Roman literature. How the layout or even content of a relief was determined or interpreted is therefore a realm of speculation.

Conclusion: Opportunities for Future Study

Despite over 200 years of scholarship and numerous intellectual challenges, the study of monumental reliefs remains an exciting field, open to advances both archaeological and methodological. For example, the forthcoming Manfred Lautenschläger Forschungsprojekt on "Politik und Monument im griechischen und römischen Altertum,"

which intends to pair an extensive computer database with traditional publications, including a two-volume overview of Roman monumental reliefs by Tonio Hölscher, may open numerous doors for future scholarship.

The potential of 3-D scanning and illustration is tantalizing as well, especially for exploring otherwise inaccessible reliefs (see essay 1.5, Frischer). A 3-D detailed scan of the Column of Marcus Aurelius could allow for full exploration of compositional and iconographic relationships within and between scenes, horizontally, vertically, and rotationally. Although reliefs are sometimes treated as if two-dimensional (an unfortunate repercussion of reliance upon frontal photographs of complete panels), three-dimensional interplay between elements can shift readings of scenes in critical ways (Huet 1996; Beard 2000; Elsner 2000).

Also intriguing are the links between reliefs and other media, both public and private. Coins and medallions are obvious comparanda (Ryberg 1955; Sobocinski 2009; Wolfram Thill 2014). Although sarcophagi and private funerary reliefs often share motifs and techniques with their monumental cousins (Beckmann 2011; see essay 4.4, Ewald), not much comparative work has been done, except when they share iconographies. The same is true for reliefs on religious themes (Moede 2007b; see also essays 4.2, McCarty; and 4.7, Petersen). Carved gems like the Gemma Augustea, relief incorporated into freestanding sculptures such as the carved cuirass on the Augustus Primaporta, mosaics, and wall paintings all offer further points of connection and comparison. Continuing research on polychromy (see essay 2.6, Abbe) is beginning to allow analysis of reliefs in (p. 287) terms of coloration and potentially in direct comparison with wall painting as well (Ara Pacis: Liverani 2010; Arch of Titus: Piening 2013; Column of Trajan: Del Monte, Ausset, and Lefevre 1998).

Of increasing interest is the small detail within larger compositions. Studies of representations of architecture have been popular lately (Quante-Schöttler 2002; Sobocinski 2009; 2014; Wolfram Thill 2010; 2011), and monumental reliefs provide evidence for otherwise vanished sculptures (Madigan 2013) and sculptural groups such as the quadrigae surmounting the arch depicted on the Arch of Titus (figure 3.5.3). While these representations are interpretive rather than documentary, they provide key evidence regarding the reception of sculpture in various contexts (Sobocinski 2009; 2014; see essays 4.1, Longfellow; and 6.4, Moormann).

Explorations of weaponry (Coulston 1989) and other assorted “marginalia” have taken overlooked elements of the reliefs and set them in a new context. Scholars are also moving beyond the emperor to study the roles of women (Zanker 2000; Dillon 2006), children (Uzzi 2005), and barbarians (Rose 1990; Hölscher 1999; Coulston 2003; Heitz 2009) in monumental reliefs. Scholars increasingly recognize, furthermore, that not all elements in reliefs need be independently significant (Wolfram Thill 2010; 2011; Sobocinski 2014). Not every depicted temple is the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, and not every woman in a monumental relief is a captured foreign queen. The inclusion of

generic elements, and the implications of this practice for the interpretation of monumental relief, warrants further exploration.

As interpretations of monumental reliefs have shifted from historical illustrations to complex, ideologically driven compositions, scholars continue to derive novel insights from these well-studied pieces. While identifying and documenting reliefs and relief fragments is still a time-consuming process, subject to the vagrancies of chance and access, new methodologies can be explored within an extensive corpus. Crucial issues still need further analysis. The concentration of monumental reliefs in the imperial capital, for example, has yet to be fully appreciated; better comparative data for provincial monuments is needed. A rich history of scholarship provides a solid foundation for future research, as well as a field for historiographical investigation. Although rooted in the earliest days of interest in Roman sculpture, the study of monumental reliefs looks forward to a promising future.

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